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THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE
ASSOCIATION OF ASSISTANT LIBRARIANS
(Section of the Library Association)

HON. EDITOR: W. B. STEVENSON Hornsey Public Libraries

Announcements

THE current volume of the ASSISTANT will consist of ten numbers only. The May issue will be followed by issues for June-July, and August-September.

The Hon. Librarian is endeavouring to obtain copies of the following numbers of the ASSISTANT: Vol. 15, Nos. 16, 17, and Index; Vol. 25, No. 8; Vol. 26, Index. If members have copies of these for disposal, will they please communicate with H. C. Twaits, Esq., F.L.A., Carnegie Library, Herne Hill Road, S.E.24.

Art and Science in Paper Manufacture¹

Julius Grant, M.Sc., Ph.D., F.I.C.

IT is not so long ago since Art and Science were regarded almost as opposing factors in industry. Ruskin said "Nothing is a great work of art for the production of which either rules or models can be given. It is not an art but a manufacture." Since then, however, the paths of Art and Science have converged, and it is now felt that their influence is supplementary rather than opposite. In no industry and at no time is this more apparent than in the paper industry of to-day, and it is proposed, therefore, to enlarge on this as the main theme of the present paper.

The necessity for a medium on which to convey messages must be almost as old as mankind itself, and some of the earliest examples were

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probably marks made in smooth sand, and subsequently scratches on stone, wax or smooth wooden surfaces. It is a far cry from this, however, even to the comparatively early date of 3700 B.C., which marks the origin of papyrus as a writing material. Even papyrus, however, cannot be classed as paper in the modern sense, since it was made by sticking together thin slices of pith cut from an Egyptian river plant, the juice of the plant itself being the adhesive—a very different process from that of paper-making as described below. Similarly, parchment is not a true paper, but a hardened skin. It derives its name from the town of Pergamus, in Asia Minor, where it was made in 200 B.C. following restrictions on the export of papyrus from Egypt; there is evidence, however, that it dates back to 2000 B.C.

We have to turn to the early history of Chinese civilization for the origin of paper as we know it to-day. The Chinese made their paper from the fibres of native trees (such as the paper mulberry) which were broken up and steeped in alkali, such as lime or the ashes of certain plants. Vegetable starches and gums were used for sizing, and chalk for loading the pulp so obtained, and it was finally formed into sheets on a sieve supported in a bamboo framework, which retained the pulp but allowed the water to drain through. The mat of wet pulp could then be pressed (to remove as much water as possible), and dried in the sun.

This method of paper-making appears to have spread from China into Europe along two routes; one *via* Tartary, Greece, Venice, and Germany. The Arabs, however, also learned the art from the Chinese prisoners captured in the attack on Samarkand in A.D. 751; and when, with the Moors, they invaded Spain in the eighth century, they took it with them. Paper was known in Spain in the tenth century, and made there in about 1150, but its spread northwards was a slow process and it was not until 1490 that the first mill was founded in England by John Tate at Hertford. The early paper-makers in England were not very successful. Civil wars, the fear of plagues and contagion from rags of doubtful origin used for paper-making, and the general illiteracy of the people were probably the main reasons. Four separate attempts had to be made before the industry was finally placed on a sound basis in about 1678. As with several other of our industries, the Huguenot refugees played an important part in this, so that in this case at any rate, religious persecution as well as war has helped to make possible some of the greatest victories of peace.

Up to this time science had played little or no part in the art of paper-making; and except for minor improvements the operations were very similar to those carried out by the Chinese. Paper is still made by hand to-day, and it is very interesting to note how little this too has changed in its essential features. Illustrations show paper-makers engaged in

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the manufacture of hand-made paper in present-day mills in England and in Kashmiri. Both learned their art from the Chinese, directly in the latter case and indirectly in the former, and both have followed it independently in lands separated by many thousands of miles; yet the similarities in the equipment and operations are very striking.

One of the most important milestones in the history of paper-making is the beginning of the nineteenth century, because this marks not only the first machine for making paper, but also the first signs of the influence of science on the industry. Two names are outstanding in his connexion. The first is that of the Fourdrinier brothers, who at Frogmore in Hertfordshire in 1804 made the first marketable machine-made paper by running wet pulp on to a moving endless belt of wire, in such a way that the water drained through while the fibres remained on the surface and could be picked off subsequently as a continuous sheet of paper. At the same time (also in Hertfordshire) John Dickinson was working independently on the so-called cylinder machine, which he patented in 1809. This consists of a hollow metal cylinder covered with wire, which is immersed and rotates in the diluted pulp. The water from the pulp then drains through the wire and is removed from the centre of the cylinder, while the pulp remains on the surface of the wire and is carried round with it to be lifted off and ultimately dried and reeled-up. Both principles are still in use to-day, the former for the manufacture of most ordinary papers and the latter for specialty papers and boards.

The advent of machine-made paper resulted indirectly in many other technical advances. The increased output of paper, for instance, gave rise to a serious shortage of the raw materials then used, which are called collectively "rags," although only linen and cotton are of any real importance in paper-making. In 1854 *The Times* offered a prize of £1,000 for a suitable substitute for rags, and after experiments with numerous likely (and unlikely) materials (strongly reminiscent of those of the last nine months) it was found that esparto grass from North Africa or southern Spain could be used satisfactorily. At the same time, however, work was also in progress on a very obvious source of paper-making fibre, namely, tree-wood, and when eventually the numerous technical difficulties were overcome this became the basic raw material for paper manufacture throughout the world. So far as this country is concerned, for instance, it provided some 80 per cent. of our pre-war pulp supplies, 17 per cent. of which were esparto, the remainder being rags. Incidentally, since the dates on which these various fibres were first used is known with certainty, their presence (which is easily established by means of the microscope) provides an excellent method of dating paper. This has proved very useful for the detection of forgeries; an alleged first edition of Tennyson's *Morte*

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D'Arthur, for instance, dated 1842, was found to contain esparto—which was not used in paper until 1861 !

In all the suggested processes for producing fibre pulp from vegetable plant materials, the plant is first broken up mechanically and digested under pressure with a chemical solution. This solution may contain either an alkali (such as caustic soda) or else an acid, in which case a solution of magnesium bisulphite is often used. The nature of the resulting pulp depends on the type of process used. In this country, for instance, we are restricted to the use of the alkaline process, partly because of the difficulty of disposing of the residual waste sulphite liquors. The solution to this problem in the case of the alkali waste liquor is to evaporate off most of the water and to burn the remaining solid matter; the heat given out during this latter operation is used to generate steam, and the final residue can be converted into caustic soda and used again. When esparto grass is cooked by the alkali process a fibre is obtained which makes a paper having excellent printing properties; it is opaque, receptive to type and does not tend to curl, and it is therefore particularly suitable for high-speed printing.

Since our esparto grass came from the Mediterranean, most of our wood pulp from Scandinavia and Finland and only a proportion of our rag supplies was home-produced, it will be seen that the war has dealt very hardly with the raw materials used by the paper industries. It is all the more remarkable, therefore, that whereas only six months ago a serious paper famine was prophesied, to-day that prospect has almost vanished. The principal reasons for this are the increased collection and re-use of waste paper, and also the use of straw which, by certain modifications in operation, can be converted into pulp with the same equipment as was used for esparto. It has been estimated in fact that some two-thirds of our pre-war consumption of paper can be supplied by the proper organization of our home-produced resources. This is most reassuring in view of the essential part played by paper, directly or indirectly, in the prosecution of war.

The principal function of the digestion processes referred to above is to dissolve or destroy the impurities present in the original material leaving unattacked, so far as possible, the fibrous constituent of the plant (cellulose) which is the paper-maker's true raw material, and which is present to the extent of 35 to 50 per cent. according to the plant used. A great proportion of our cheaper paper (such as newsprint) is, however, made by grinding wood mechanically, so that only the grosser impurities (such as knots and bark) are removed. Such paper serves a most useful purpose for the more ephemeral types of publication, but it has a relatively low standard of colour and cleanliness and its lasting properties are poor.

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After the raw material (whether wood, straw, esparto, etc.) has been disintegrated into pulp form by a cooking process, it is washed and bleached, usually with bleaching powder solution; or according to more recent practice, by treatment in succession with chlorine and this bleaching solution. It is then washed and diluted, and passed over so-called "sand-trays," which are long wooden trays on the floors of which are projecting wooden slats which serve to trap the heavy particles as the pulp passes over them. The fibres are then persuaded (with the aid of vibration) to pass through fine slits in metal plates, so that knots or undisintegrated lumps (for instance, derived from rootlets, bark, etc.) are held back. The pulp is then ready for the next stage of manufacture, which is known as beating, and is held by many to be the most important of all. It is said, in fact, that paper is born in the beater, but this is not quite correct because beating is a preparation process rather than a process of actual manufacture. Nevertheless it can truthfully be said that paper is "conceived" in the beater, because it is the beating process which determines mainly the type of paper which will ultimately be obtained. It is at this stage, too, that the combination of art and science in paper manufacture is most strikingly demonstrated.

(To be concluded)

Popular Fiction in the Children's Library

Lily Price

"**N**OBODY asked your opinion," said Alice.
"Who's making personal remarks now?" the Hatter asked, triumphantly."

The vexed problem of the provision of popular "tripe" for the masses has long occupied the attention of those "Venerable Bedes," the librarians (to say nothing of the curators) of the adult library. It may, therefore, seem something of a presumption for a children's librarian to trespass on the hallowed ground of this pet grievance.

We have heard earnest and enthusiastic children's librarians sweep the popular schoolgirl and schoolboy story into the pulping machine with a few well-chosen words, claiming that if only "good books" are provided, the children's reading tastes will immediately improve. We have also listened with respect to the sound argument that if the market for these popular books is decreased the amount of good books published will ultimately increase. These well-meaning informers have overlooked several obvious and overwhelming truths, or perhaps they have purposely

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ignored them because of their cult of literature, which is, after all, part of the librarian's creed.

Professor Joad says, "Children do not, except when admonished thereto by adults . . . appreciate sonnets, or love the highest when they see it. Broadly speaking, it is not until puberty is reached that the aesthetic sense can be said to exist. Even then it must be trained . . . if it is not to run riot in the lush jungle of the 'talkies,' the 'crooners,' and the best-sellers, which are the distinctive contribution of our age to art." In short, children must go through a process of growing up during which time reading is a paramount necessity. The fact that much adult taste remains undeveloped and childish to the end of its days is not necessarily due to the kind of books read in childhood. If children's librarians would honestly recall the reading habits of their younger days they would remember reading with avidity the stories of Angela Brazil, Ethel Talbot, Richmal Crompton and the rest, and yet admit that this has not impaired their mature reading tastes. Many a modern librarian gloomily foretells that readers of such "tripe" will continue with a diet on the same lines. Many of them undoubtedly will do so, but equally certainly some will climb from the ruts in the valley to accompany the children's librarian on the rare heights!

By total exclusion of the much maligned "tripe" the children's librarian not only fails to recognize a psychological characteristic which is present in all ordinary children, but she denies her borrowers the right of free choice in their reading. The children are to be forced to read what the librarian considers good for them whether they enjoy it or not. If they have not the capacity for the appreciation of good books—and their education in no way produces for them delicate literary palates—they will go elsewhere for entertainment. In a recent questionnaire which set out to discover what boys and girls read, A. J. Jenkinson arrives at the conclusion that "the private reading of boys is largely chosen from inferior books, magazines and newspapers," and comments that "it is natural that juvenile and adolescent tastes should be 'inferior' to adult tastes. It is also natural that adults should think them worse than they are, because they tend to judge them by adult standards."

The present system of elementary education in the short and merry years from five to fourteen in the life of a child is able to do very little more than to prepare him to become an efficient machine-minder and cinema-goer. In those short years there is not time to make the children aware of the world of art about them, of poetry, music, and painting, which are such essential backgrounds to the training in the appreciation of fine literature. Indeed, it is a condemnation of the modern age that in spite of all its potential wealth, only a small minority of children are given

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the benefit of an education beyond the age of about fourteen years. The results of A. J. Jenkinson's questionnaire clearly show that the ages from fifteen to seventeen are the turning-point in the life of a child, and it is at this stage that future cultural activity can be influenced most. Can it be wondered, then, that the librarian of the adult library laments the demand for inferior books when a large percentage of children are thrust into the world of workshop and factory at the age of fourteen without any further guidance? Moreover, in the literature lessons at school many of the children have had their liking for good books permanently warped by the evil practice of reading round the class great classics which were never intended for juvenile readers. The designers of the English curriculum in schools are so afraid that children will never read the classics unless they are forced to, that they cram an unbelievable list of unsuitable books into these early impressionable years. The children's library itself, being a devoted addict to the "catch them while they are young" adage, also merits condemnation if it encourages the wholesale mutilation in epitomes and "retold for children" editions of great books. The children can surely afford to wait a few more years for their literary heritage instead of being made to suffer this mess of pottage? However, there are healthy signs that a revolt against the traditional method of teaching literature in schools is imminent. From various hints dropped by publishers we learn that the education authorities are not only buying more books which have really been written for children, but are actually taking into account the demand for "blood and thunder."

In the light of these facts the children's librarian can only steer a middle course and hope for the best. The book stock should offer the children the best and the librarian should use all means in her power, by persuasion, book talks and guile, to make the children aware of the fun that awaits them if they will give these books a fair trial. In this we join forces with the B.B.C. who do much to stimulate the reading of their young listeners. After the umpteenth request for a book in process of being broadcast as a serial, the cynical children's librarian feels inclined to tell the child bluntly that he has fallen in love with the charming presentation of the B.B.C. and will not like its book counterpart!

On the other hand, have we any right to deny the children those school stories and hair-raising adventure yarns which are so dear to their hearts and *were* so dear to the hearts of those librarians who now condemn them as "tripe"? So many children's librarians lack that desirable Peter Pan quality which is liable to discern the needs of children instead of surveying the whole matter from hardened, matter-of-fact adult eyes. For those who decide to fulfil the demand we would like to put in the plea to use discretion in selection. So many cheap annuals and play-books are not

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worthy of inclusion in the book stock and should be left as the prerogative of kind-hearted uncles at Christmas.

As a whispered tail-piece to the foregoing paragraphs we have more than a suspicion that if we were to don an impenetrable disguise (an improbability—one would recognize a fellow librarian anywhere !) and walk into any other children's library, we would find these precepts carried out despite the high-falutin' notions of their librarians. But the peculiar inconsistencies in their theory and practice is a private hobby-horse and need not be mounted here !

Current Books: The Arts

Caricature. Portraits of Christ. Primitive Art. European painting and sculpture. Penguin Books. 1s. and 6d. each.

IF the man in the street ignores art, it will not be Allen Lane's fault. These four latest additions to the Penguin series are the equal in scope and production of many art books at ten times the price. The first two are "King Penguins" and contain a series of excellent colour plates and an outline history of the subject. Adam's *Primitive Art* is superbly done, economical in style, wide in scope, and lavishly illustrated. Eric Newton's *European painting* is an admirably balanced and well-written survey, with well-chosen illustrations. Librarians must not neglect these little books, for they are masterpieces of popular exposition.

EDWARD CARRICK. *Designing for the moving picture.* Studio. 8s. 6d.

This is not another "arty" book about the cinema, but a practical manual of how to do it. Here you may find out how to make an old stone wall with plaster, a London fog with Nujol, a shipwreck with models, and a dozen other of those marvellous illusions that make the cinema what it is to-day. This is a valuable book for the film technician, and a fascinating one for the amateur of the cinema. The illustrations and diagrams are excellent, and the price reasonable.

ADAM CARSE. *The Orchestra in the eighteenth century.* Heffer. 10s. 6d.

The author describes the constitution and development of the orchestra of Haydn, Mozart, and their contemporaries. Mr. Carse examines the personnel of ninety orchestras, describes their duties, and the methods of arrangement of scores. He devotes a most interesting and learned chapter to the position of the director of *concertmeister*, and by means of technical examples shows the level of performance of the time. This book is a piece of masterly research, by our foremost English authority on the subject.

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V. C. CLINTON-BADDELEY. *Words for music.* C.U.P. 7s. 6d.

Poet and composer must once again collaborate if they are to produce songs as fine as those of the past. Poetry is not necessarily "words for music," and vice-versa, and the author supports this argument by wide quotation, charming illustration, and a delightful dogmatism. The whole, decked out in a liquid prose, makes up into an excellent and convincing volume.

DICKINSON, A. E. F. *Beethoven.* Nelson. 2s. 6d.

An interesting "discussion" of Beethoven's life and work, written for the amateur. The musical illustrations are well chosen, and the themes are also given in the tonic sol-fa notation. Dr. Dickinson throughout insists on the *study* of Beethoven, and his book does much to forward appreciation of the great master by easy stages: while the biographical details give us enough of Beethoven's life to appreciate his music.

ROGER FISKE. *Beethoven's last quartets (the musical pilgrim).* O.U.P. 2s.

In the realm of "absolute" music, the Beethoven quartets from Opus 127 to Opus 135 stand foremost. Their meaning is obscure to all but the advanced musician; therefore this short guide, with its not too technical analysis of their structure and themes of the quartets, is of especial interest. A brief introduction describes the circumstances in which the quartets were written; the whole is a valuable guide-book for the earnest listener.

G. G. HOLME, Editor. *Decorative art, 1941.* Studio. 8s. 6d.

A topical introduction by Professor C. H. Reilly discusses the effect of the war on architecture and suggests that a modified neo-style of the type of Oliver Hill's may be the best for post-war reconstruction. The contents, this year rearranged according to the chief rooms of the average dwelling-house, are invigorating in their assurance that design has by no means deteriorated recently. The colour illustrations are few but good, and attention is especially drawn to the charming Games and Rumpus Room, and the Day and Night Nurseries.

PHAIDON PRESS. *The Paintings of Vermeer.* Allen & Unwin. 12s. 6d.

A complete collection of the forty or so authentic pictures of the great Dutch painter. The plates are superb, glowing and full of the light and colour for which Vermeer is famous: the monochrome plates show his superb brushwork. A lovely book; librarians are urged to buy it before it goes out of print!

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HORTENSE PANUM. *Stringed instruments of the Middle Ages.* Revised and edited by Jeffrey Pulver. William Reeves. 22s. 6d.

Miss Panum spent some years of research on the writing of this compendious book. From ancient Egypt to Europe of the sixteenth century, the author catalogues and describes all the various stringed instruments, both extant or known only from drawings or sculptures. There are over 400 illustrations and many musical examples, and the treatment is as complete as the most earnest student could desire. The book is an invaluable addition to our musical reference library.

BRENDA PUTNAM. *The Sculptor's way.* Lane. 35s.

A really sumptuous book; the publishers are to be congratulated upon its appearance in wartime. The text is admirably arranged; composition and the copying of casts lead to modelling and anatomy, and to a technical description of the sculptor's methods. Specialized chapters on wood, ceramics, bronzes, and stone carving follow. The illustrations are many and superb; this is an admirable volume and should be of great value both to student and layman.

Students' Problems

A. J. Walford

IN introducing this feature in the autumn of 1937, Mr. Halliday declared that its aim was not to provide a short cut to examination success. Nevertheless, as he pointed out, many students had not the slightest idea of study technique, and it was in order to give them guidance and to suggest improved methods of study that "Students' Problems" came into being. This objective is something to be underlined at the present time, when oral tuition—and all else is but a substitute for it—is often un procurable, when text-books are increasingly difficult to obtain and when conditions for study are very far from ideal.

This is the month when students, at the approach of examination week, so commonly pack up their valises of initiative and general reading and decide to rely on the limited resources of the well-crammed purse of text-book idioms. One of the virtues of a lecture course is that it makes a steady weekly demand on the student, whereas a monthly correspondence course paper may be rushed off to the tutor in the last few days of the month, the student then lying fallow for some three weeks, until the next paper has to be considered. Only in the examination room itself is it frequently discovered that the previous reasoning-out of carefully accumulated facts and opinions—assimilation as opposed to cramming—really counts above all else.

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Complaints are received that text-books are unobtainable just when they are most needed; this presumably refers to the concentrated demand for books either at the beginning of a course or immediately before the examination to be taken. The wise student will obtain nearly all he wants by applying to the A.A.L. Library and elsewhere during the "close" period of the summer months. He will then not only satisfy his reading requirements but preserve a very valuable continuity of study. Apart from this, there is much useful material at the elbow of every assistant in the country. How many candidates in Advanced Library Administration have made a point of scanning the *Library association record* each month for articles which may be of use to them, filing the excellent plans and photographs of new libraries, and noting any relevant statistical data? How many students mark the "Literature of librarianship" feature as a matter of course, or note examiners' comments on previous papers—in fact, turn their professional journals to real profit? The minority, it would seem.

Subsistence on recommended text-books of literary history, to take another example, worthy though the text-books may be, fashions the unenterprising mind and produces the stereotyped answer. Why must students left to their own resources nearly always study literary history in purely chronological fashion, from Widsith to Wolfe? There would be some excuse for this method were they studying periods as a whole, their art, politics, ideas, economic and social conditions, but this is not the case. The more profitable line of approach is surely that of taking cross-sections of literature, of tracing the development of poetry, or of a particular form of it, through several decades. At times it is only so that the development of style, the play of external influences, can truly be appreciated. Professor Ifor Evans's *A short history of English literature* (in the Pelican Books series)—there are others—is worth the perusal of any student who tires of the ordinary type of survey. For the advanced course this policy might be applied with wider effect. Try a foreign estimate of English literature, such as Legouis and Cazamian; or for the special period, read contemporary criticisms, biographies, social and cultural histories and attempt to assess the spirit of the time. To treat a subject set for examination purposes as something to be taken out of a pigeon-hole, digested without relating it to much else outside itself is, from the educational and professional point of view, worse than useless. It is one of the reasons why, after the examination day is over, a number of students tend to spew forth their unnaturally acquired knowledge and turn to something fresh.

The intermediate section produces occasional technical problems, and one or two hints might profitably be offered. In the theory of classification students are early balked by the terminology of Jevons and, faced in

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the examination by a quotation of his which they are asked to elucidate, they frequently either take care to avoid it or, venturing when all else is lost, devote an almost completely irrelevant answer to the question. You are either mentally capable of understanding logical terminology or not; if you are not, then you had better concentrate your attention on other aspects of the subject: there is little room for a middle course. Much the same applies to questions on a specific class of the Library of Congress or Cutter scheme, although in this case the student is earnestly advised to examine *in the original* one or two representative classes of each classification (especially classes in which the fundamental conception of arrangement differs from that of Dewey). Study the leading features of these classes thoroughly and through them see the framework of the whole scheme.

In practical classification one does well to remember that, as in ordinary library classifying one does not class books without reference to existing classified stock, so in examination classifying one should not assign class numbers to annotated book-titles without reference to allied and contrasted examples in the same paper. (I pair a few examples recently set together: *The childless family—Seasons of birth*; *Wild life and landscape in Britain: studies in natural history—Statistical methods for medical and biological students*; *Fourth Antique Dealers' Fair—Catalogue of the contents of Norfolk House, St. James's Square, London.*)

In practical cataloguing the chief grievance of students is that they have insufficient time in which to do justice to ten prospectuses. Have they really tried to rid their cataloguing of superfluities? There is no need, for example, to repeat the author's name after the title; in a number of cases the Anglo-American code permits the use of references instead of added entries. With subject entry it is sufficient, provided one example of method has been given, to indicate subject headings only (although title and series entries should be given in full). Annotations should be restricted to the recognized length and not be allowed to develop into budding essays, with introductions and conclusions. Finally, in the case of index entries for a classified catalogue, some of the economies practised in the examples given in Mr. Sharp's *Cataloguing* might well be followed.

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Correspondence

GANTSHILL LIBRARY,
CRANBROOK ROAD,
ILFORD.

28th February, 1941.

THE EDITOR,
THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT.

SIR,—

In Mr. Collison's article on reconstruction, he states that many junior assistants are going into the Forces with only their elementary examination, and coming out at the age of 22 or 23 as men who expect responsible positions and salaries, but whose qualifications may warrant neither.

Far worse is the case of the assistant who goes into the Forces without his elementary examination—cases which will become more numerous as the military age limit goes down.

Admittedly, time is given to take examinations while serving in the Forces, but if the assistant happens to be in a unit requiring technical study, he will find it almost impossible to study for his elementary examination at the same time.

There are two solutions to this position:

A. The possibility of taking the elementary examination in parts, or the whole to be passed in two consecutive examinations. In this case an assistant who has passed the whole examination in two parts, and is then called up, will not feel that his studies have been wasted.

B. During the war the abolition of the written elementary examination and the setting up of a board of examiners to interview candidates. In this way, an assistant can be told whether he will stand any chance in library work, and not be left to enter the Forces without any qualifications, and a very uncertain future in the library profession when he is demobilised.

Yours faithfully,
"JUNIOR ASSISTANT."

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PUBLIC LIBRARY,
MANSFIELD.

8th April, 1941.

THE EDITOR,
THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT.

DEAR SIR,—

In proving that young assistants are not necessarily either "dumb, docile, tame or inarticulate," the enclosed account of an inter-library staff meeting organized and supported solely by assistants whose ages are either under twenty or very little over, may improve a little the apparently poor reputation with which we, as a class, have been saddled.

This meeting did at least show that we are not lacking in the belief that librarianship is indeed "nice work if you can get it," and that there are far more profitable ways of spending leisure than reading condescendingly sympathetic or scornful opinions addressed to us through the cold print of our professional journals. Perhaps those deep thinkers forget that praiseworthy administrative schemes are made or marred by those who pass the service on to the general public, a task which all too often is left for juniors to execute. However, borrowers do not seem less appreciative in these wartime days when, perhaps, the flower of the profession has been called upon to perform other duties. Thus, perhaps, the juniors have good reason to expect a higher place in the post-war professional hierarchy.

Finally, I think Mr. Bryon would do well to emphasize that the face value of an article is not necessarily, a true conception of the higher value which lies beneath it.

Yours sincerely,
CYRIL PHIPPS.

INTER-LIBRARY STAFF MEETINGS

Acting on a proposal by the staff of Worksop Public Library, fourteen members of the staffs of Worksop, Newark, and Mansfield public libraries met together in Mansfield Reference Library on Sunday, 6th April, 1941, at 2.30 p.m. The aim of these suggested quarterly meetings was to bring to light, through open discussion, the problems and difficulties which increased wartime responsibilities had left younger assistants to solve and overcome.

Having initiated the idea, the Worksop staff, through Miss Coupland, had offered to take the lead in this first meeting, so Mr. Walker opened the programme with an interesting paper on the library facilities offered to

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the evacuees and soldiers who inundated the Worksop area, explaining how the staff stood up to this heavy taxing of their resources. Following this up with "Book selection," Miss Coupland cited the example of a family of borrowers whose wartime interests were reflected in their choice of books on A.R.P., wartime cookery, air navigation, etc. The borrower's point of view in book selection, all too often forgotten in the welter of papers on the librarian's problems, was given priority. Completing the Worksop trio, Mr. Germany explained the work of library publicity, showing how simple tools, combined with artistic ingenuity produced effective results. A general discussion which followed proved very profitable, it being unanimously agreed that similar informal meetings should continue to be held.

Through the kind offices of Mr. Cronshaw, tea was taken at the Plaza café.

THE EDITOR,
THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT.

SIR,—

The feeling with which Mr. Collison's second article on "Reconstruction" left me was one of "pie-in-the-sky." It seems that we are only to think of things in terms of "after the War," whenever that may be, and that reconstruction and the development of culture in the present period is quite out of the question—nay, even unthinkable. The writer had himself said a great deal in favour of reconstruction NOW, all of which he completely failed to consider in his approach to practical methods. This is the basis of my criticism.

Let us examine some of the writer's statements. For example, he points out, quite rightly, that although most library assistants are reserved over the age of thirty, this position must not be regarded as being permanent, but must necessarily depend on the progress of the War and on the ability of the Public Libraries and the Library Association to urge the necessity for the conduct of an efficient library service *during the present time*. Further, he suggests that the older men who are not eligible for military service are, nevertheless, engaged, in some way or another, in Civil Defence duties, and that on the basis of these points it can be seen that there is a divorce from librarianship which for many of these people will last for some time after the War. Again, "most librarians add to their knowledge and experience daily in their work: not only will this development be lost, but some of the knack and facility with which they normally coped with technical problems will have to be regained." With all these statements I agree, and I think that any thinking person will agree with

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them, too. But to what do they all point? In my opinion, they point to the fact that at the present time there are no facilities for the great majority of library assistants to learn their profession and to obtain the necessary experience to enable them to maintain and to further the standard of Public Library service. The male assistants are being drafted into the Forces; the female assistants may possibly be needed for the working of the Government scheme of industrial conscription, and in any case have not an equal footing in the profession with the males, as a correspondent pointed out in your February issue. This is the main problem with which we are faced, the solution to which we must regard as a matter of life and death to the library profession.

Yet what does Mr. Collison offer as a solution? What plan does he lay down for the alleviation of the present difficulties? None at all! Instead, he evades the main issue and puts forward the suggestion of a "Refresher School" *after the War*. He assumes that the libraries can afford to dispense with the services of a large number of staff for a short period after the War—"in spite of the fact that they will then be needed more than ever." What right has he to assume this, particularly in view of his last admission, which he slurs over with such a criminal carelessness of manner? Are we to gather by this that we must be completely blind to the present, blind to realize what consequences such a lack of awareness is likely to bring? We must recognize the fact that an efficient library service during the present time is of far greater import to the cultural development of the people than it has ever been, that not even a major war can be allowed to obviate the need for cultural progress—indeed, it is for the preservation of culture that we are presumed to be fighting, and if we are to convince other countries and other peoples (including our own) that this is our true aim, then we must be prepared to practise what we preach.

We are all aware of the present position of library service, and we can all envisage the future development from this position. We must therefore do everything in our power to persuade the Government, as Mr. Collison says, "of the necessity for the conduct of an efficient library service in these times." If we are able successfully to do this, then we shall have ensured that the service will not have received a mortal blow as a result of war conditions. My proposals are, therefore, the following:

(1) That female assistants in public library service be exempt from industrial conscription, and that they be given every opportunity to become fully trained in the profession, and receive equal treatment and equal opportunities with males.

(2) That throughout the armed forces, a complete library system be

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established, which will provide an opportunity for fully trained assistants to maintain their previous standards of efficiency and technique, and will also provide scope for others new to the profession to receive training in their work, thus ensuring that new forces are continually coming forward and being developed.

Such proposals, if carried into effect (and that is not beyond the bounds of possibility), will mean that the cultural level of the people, both inside and outside the armed forces, will steadily rise, and that after the War a completely efficient library service will be in being. What is of still greater importance is the fact that with this cultural development will go the development of the people's mental faculties to the extent that they will realize that wars and their accompanying misery and disaster can and must be abolished for ever, and that in the people, and the people alone, lies the power to do it.

Yours, etc.,

J. GOLDSTEIN.

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